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DIRECTORATE OF
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Intelligence Memorandum

Gierek's Poland: A Mandate for Change

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Gierek's Poland: A Mandate for ChangeSummary

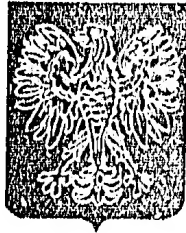
Since party First Secretary Edward Gierek took power from Wladyslaw Gomulka on 20 December 1970, a new style of rule has appeared in Poland. Given the circumstances surrounding his accession to power, Gierek has accomplished a great deal in 15 months. With more vigor than Gomulka showed, he has firmly grasped political power, obtained the cooperation of nearly all strata of the population, and imbued the nation with a sense of participation in government. He has also won increased political and material support from the USSR and his other Warsaw Pact allies.

Many of Gierek's initial moves at home were dictated by expediency, and long-term solutions have not yet been hammered out. To fulfill his goals, Gierek needs the support of his friends abroad. He is wise enough to know that he cannot do without the political and material support of the Soviet Union. But Gierek is much more likely than Gomulka to look at Poland's self-interest and seek a more influential place for his country in Europe. So far, Gierek has displayed both the confidence and energy necessary to tackle the problems facing the nation, and he seems to know where he wants to go. He has forged a team of like-minded party and government officials, and the people, sensing a new spirit in the regime, seem willing to help take Poland into the modern age.

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Edward Gierek



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The Succession--Genesis and Aftermath

1. The circumstances under which Gierek became first secretary differed substantially from those that ushered in the Gomulka era in October 1956. Gomulka had been installed after a long period of intense factional strife. The party had been weakened and disorganized by de-Stalinization, and popular disaffection with the USSR and the Polish party as its instrument had increased. The ferment was led and articulated by liberal intellectuals, even though the workers in Poznan had held protest demonstrations in June.

2. Because of the disarray in the party that he inherited, Gomulka was forced to expend most of his energies to maintain factional balances within the hierarchy. Thus preoccupied, he neglected the needs of the nation. Alarmed at the periodic outbursts of popular dissatisfaction, Gomulka incorporated into his regime increasing numbers of hard-line elements to control the people. By 1967 the miasma of political stagnation, stifling bureaucratization, and corruption that resulted had both isolated Gomulka and his old guard from the rank and file of the party and heightened the regime's hostility to criticism and change. Confronting the Gomulka government were not only politically apathetic but economically dissatisfied masses. The leadership also faced dissatisfaction in the younger generation of party functionaries--"apparatchiks" and "technocrats" alike. It was these people who proved to be the main force behind the party crisis that nearly toppled the Gomulka regime in 1968.

3. Two party leaders seemed to be vying for Gomulka's mantle in 1968: security chief Mieczyslaw Moczar, head of the party's hard-line anti-Semitic faction, and Edward Gierek, the tough-minded administrator of the key industrial province of Katowice. Because of Gierek's proven administrative skills, many Poles believed that he was capable of meeting the demands of a modernizing society. Gierek was supported not only by most of the educated technocrats and reformists, but also by many of the tough,

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young, nationalist party functionaries who had previously supported Moczar.

4. Gomulka, however, succeeded in reimposing a semblance of stability, although most Poles realized that he was only postponing his exit. By December 1970, mounting economic stagnation and popular dissatisfaction had reached a peak, and when Gomulka, who had been preoccupied with foreign affairs, made the mistake of raising food, fuel, and rent prices just before Christmas it led to an explosion. Somewhat surprisingly, it was the relatively prosperous and elite skilled workers from the Baltic coast who took the lead, thus catching the leadership off guard and permitting Gierek's smooth take-over.

5. Gierek had neither schemed to precipitate the crisis nor welcomed the danger that it posed for Communist rule in Poland. He may have foreseen the possibility of Gomulka's downfall, however, and seemed to be ready to meet the challenge. With the country on the brink of open revolt, Gierek faced several tasks. First, he had to calm the militant workers, especially since their initially spontaneous uprising was showing signs of a country-wide movement. Second, he had to demonstrate that he was prepared to respond quickly to the most acute needs of the people. Third, he had to gain control over the party and the government bureaucracies, which, because of their aloofness from the people, were among the primary targets of the disgruntled working class. Finally, he had to ensure that the Soviet Union and his other allies would support his policies and not renege on their initial endorsement of his regime.

6. In seeking to achieve these goals, Gierek had several factors going for him. The workers' disturbances did not take on an anti-Soviet coloration. Equally important, although the workers laid their grievances at the feet of the party leadership, neither the party as a whole nor the socialist system was the main target of attack.

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Moreover, most of the agitation had been by the skilled workers, who felt they had most to lose from Gomulka's ill-considered price increases and changes in work rules. The peasantry, unaffected by Gomulka's proposed measures, was quiet. Intellectuals and youth were also inactive. Finally, the powerful Roman Catholic Church kept its peace; it merely counseled non-violence.

7. The fact that Gierek, unlike Gomulka, assumed power with Soviet endorsement and with no strong domestic opposition enabled him to gain substantial economic assistance from his allies. Thus, he was able to turn his attention to urgent tasks at home. By the spring of 1971, having blamed the past on the outgoing leadership, he weathered a second wave of strikes by militant workers and cautiously was implementing his program of domestic renewal with its emphasis on material well-being and social reform. Although his initial measures treated the symptoms rather than the causes of Poland's economic and political ills, they gained him the labor peace that he needed. By mid-year Gierek had consolidated his strong hold on the leadership through a carefully phased series of personnel changes. These included the removal from influence of Moczar.

8. Gierek's reputation as an efficient administrator and tough party leader was impressive long before he became a national leader. A former miner, he was long active in the Communist movement in Western Europe, where he spent the war years before returning to Poland. His manner is straightforward and sincere, neither crude nor polished. Although far from a political liberal, he believes in listening to advice from below as well as issuing orders. Gierek's approachability, pragmatism, and commitment to rewarding good work are the same qualities that earned him the respect, if not the unqualified admiration, of the workers during his 13-year tenure in Katowice.

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9. Gierek is likely to be more willing than Gomulka to delegate responsibility. Over the long run he will also probably be more inclined to expand relations with those abroad who are sympathetic with Poland's economic needs. It is likely that he will move cautiously and unobtrusively; he will tend to operate like Hungary's Kadar, not like Romania's Ceausescu. Because of his long residence in France and Belgium, Gierek undoubtedly is more capable than the parochial Gomulka of understanding the non-Communist world.

In Search of Popular Support

10. Gierek's major problem in winning over the militant workers was that he had little more to offer them in material terms than did his predecessor. Initially, he tackled their immediate grievances and assured them that he would take no arbitrary measure affecting their future welfare. He raised the income of four million of the lowest paid workers and pensioners, the worst off among the 33 million Poles. But it had been the skilled workers who had sparked the revolt, and they were far from pleased with what they received: a short-term guarantee that their standard of living would not worsen and that the authorities would rework the economic plan to better their lives. Most of all, the skilled workers resented the statement that the price increases made in December 1970 would remain in effect.

11. The inadequacy of these measures was quickly revealed by a second wave of strikes. Gierek was forced to make frequent personal appearances before the workers urging that greater local efforts be made to improve working conditions. In March 1971 not only did he rescind the price rises of the previous December but he promised that prices would remain stable for at least two years. With the help of a \$100-million loan from the USSR, he managed substantially to increase the supply of meat available to consumers--the first such rise in five years. All these measures, together with Gierek's strong personal appeal, were

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favorably received by the workers and gave him time to fulfill his promises.

12. Gierek realized that he also needed the cooperation of the peasants to grow the food he was promising his people. Peasants were offered higher prices for farm products. This year, Gierek fulfilled his promise to replace compulsory deliveries with a contract system that gives the peasants considerable leeway in their operations. He has eased the peasants' anxieties about future farm policy by guaranteeing that private ownership of most land would continue. New legislation has given many peasants clear title to land that had been state property (although they had been tilling it).

13. Gierek has also struck an acceptable relationship with the intellectuals, students, and middle class. Initially, this relationship was ambiguous. These interest groups had fewer economic grievances than the workers, but Gierek must have known from the beginning that he would need their support to mobilize the population at large and balance the workers' strong influence on his regime. Gierek's new spokesmen on cultural policy have emphasized that although fundamental party control over culture must remain intact, there will be artistic freedom for all who do not produce works "hostile to socialism or challenge our fraternal alliances." Most Polish intellectuals, particularly those of the older generation, seem inclined to accept the terms of this softer cultural policy. It has permitted many previously banned authors to reappear in print. It has also allowed more foreign travel for intellectuals.

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The Gierek Style

15. Gierek's success in obtaining popular support and generating hope for a better future stems less from specific policy shifts than from the style of his rule, which is designed to convince the people that he is genuinely dedicated to bridging the gap between the rulers and the ruled. Since coming to power, Gierek's moves have been consistent: he has avoided repression, but has indicated that discipline is a key element in his policy. He has condemned the past, but has stressed that the party and its genuine accomplishments remain unassailable, though leaders come and go. He has made concessions, but has warned of the dangers inherent in excessive pressure from below. He has stressed the need for increased efficiency in government and its responsiveness to the people, but has emphasized that this responsibility runs both ways.

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16. In innumerable face-to-face meetings with the people, Gierek has sought to demonstrate that there is now open and direct dialogue between the highest echelons of the party and government and the people. That this principle was initially forced upon Gierek by the workers' militancy detracts neither from its novelty in Poland nor from his guarantee that it will remain a permanent feature of his regime. Meetings of the policy-making

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party politburo were rarely held and never publicized when Gomulka was in charge. Under Gierek, meetings are frequent and are often expanded to include non-party specialists. The results are regularly published in abbreviated form. Unlike the cabalistic practices of Gomulka's top leadership, members of Gierek's politburo, secretariat, and central committee departments--as well as government ministers and their deputies--are in direct contact with workers and special interest organizations throughout the country. Moreover, their appearances have been marked by genuine dialogues. Finally, cabinet ministers, party leaders, and leaders of mass organizations have submitted to critical interviews on radio and television. Recently these programs have been expanded to include questions submitted by the listening audience while the program is on the air.

17. Gierek clearly intends to retain firm control of the media, but he feels that more open discussion of domestic problems will serve as a safety valve for popular dissatisfaction, a means to overcome public apathy, and a catalyst for constructive change. Soon after he took over Gierek established a permanent cabinet-level post of under-secretary of state for information who now regularly reports to the press on the proceedings of the government, and submits to questions--often pointed--by journalists. Gierek has also tolerated, and in some cases encouraged, publication of mildly provocative articles in the press. Although the media do not question the role of the party or the permanence of the socialist system in Poland, they have offered opportunities for discussing long-range social and economic options facing the country. In this way Gierek has brought public discussion to bear on the same tasks that are being thrashed out in permanent and ad hoc commissions within the regime.

18. Another major feature of Gierek's design for improving the domestic political climate is his Kadar-like acceptance of the concept that "all who are not against us are with us." He has not only appointed workers and respected non-party professionals to numerous positions at all levels of

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government but has also expressed his determination to eliminate discrimination based on class background or religious beliefs. These innovations are probably designed to buttress his policy of improving church-state relations and also to heal wounds in the body politic that had been rubbed raw during Gomulka's last years in power. The politically motivated, anti-Semitic purges that characterized the intra-party struggle in 1968 and the exodus of Poland's leading Jews that followed have removed the issues of anti-Semitism in the Gierek regime. It may be noted, however, that Gierek either did not take part in, or soon dissociated himself from, the anti-Semitic excesses of 1968.

19. These tangible changes in the style of leadership have been accompanied by a public relations campaign to project a new image of the party and the government, and to mobilize Polish patriotism in support of Gierek's policies. For example, Gierek's decision to rebuild the ancient royal castle in Warsaw--destroyed during World War II--has a strong nationalistic appeal to Poles everywhere. The project, however, forces patriotism into the constructive and relatively harmless channel of restoring a national symbol and commends the Gierek regime even to non-Communist exiles. Moreover, a special national fund created to finance the project is bringing in some hard currency from ethnic Poles abroad. Another example was the replacement, early in Gierek's tenure, of the portraits of party and government leaders in official buildings by the centuries-old state seal, the Polish eagle. Though no less omnipresent in the lives of the people, the regime's power is thus represented by a symbol that generates pride rather than resentment.

20. To be convincing, these innovations in style had to be accompanied by a basic decision to avoid the arbitrary use of force and intimidation. Not only have the police and the security apparatus kept a low profile, but the brutal measures against the workers' demonstrations in December 1970 have

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been roundly condemned, and the deputy defense minister in charge of the militarized security units unceremoniously "exiled" as ambassador to Algeria. Gierek made clear, however, that he did not intend these moves to be misread as blaming the security apparatus for all the excesses of the previous regime, nor did he intend them to cripple police effectiveness. A thorough review of security practices and personnel undertaken last year served a dual purpose: to weed out those with lingering loyalties to former security chief Moczar, and to enlist public cooperation in apprehending subversive elements and troublemakers who commit criminal acts as a result of the more open atmosphere in the country.

A New Team for a New Deal

21. To consolidate his grasp on the levers of power, Gierek has had to rid all levels of the party and government machinery of excess baggage accumulated during the Gomulka era and has had to install his own people. He also is trying to change the nature of the party and the government so that the new relationship between the regime and people will appear credible. His decision to convoke a party congress in December 1971--a year ahead of schedule--showed that he was confident he could achieve his goals and attain an uncontested mandate at the congress.

22. Immediately after taking office, Gierek came under strong pressure from all sides--the people, the party, and possibly even Moscow--to explain the causes of the December 1970 crisis. At a key plenum of the central committee in February 1971, he divorced his regime from its predecessor. He accused the former leaders of labeling the riots a counter-revolution when, in fact, they were an expression of legitimate grievances. He also blamed the clique surrounding Gomulka and his ousted politburo colleagues for having lost touch with the people and for mismanaging the social and economic system.

The Party

23. The situation within the party when Gierek took over bore some resemblance to but was also quite different from that confronting Gomulka in 1956. Gomulka had had to enlist the support of powerful leaders already on the scene who were mutually antagonistic. Gierek, on the other hand, faced no such built-in rivals, except Moczar. Gierek did, however, keep several holdovers from the Gomulka regime in order to have a team broadly representative of a cross-section of "party opinion."

24. Moczar's role as a potential rival to Gierek was grossly overestimated, both by supporters and detractors. Gierek and Moczar had differed in the past, but they had also on occasion cooperated. After December 1970, more from necessity than inclination, they again did so. There is strong evidence that he had been divested of his responsibilities on the party secretariat for internal security long before he suffered a heart seizure in April 1971, and certainly before he was ousted from the secretariat in June. Moczar's ouster from the politburo at the party congress was thus anti-climactic. In any event, the attention focused on the Gierek-Moczar "rivalry" within the leadership masked a relatively smooth process, with Gierek progressively whittling away politically embarrassing holdovers of the previous regime.

25. Gierek's major problem in consolidating his hold on the party in advance of the congress, like that which faced Gomulka in 1956, was the reorganization of the middle and lower echelons of the apparatus. Gierek's extensive shifts in cadre focused on the provincial party organizations; by mid-year he had replaced half of the 19 provincial party leaders who were on the scene in December 1970: the rest were gone by the eve of the party congress. Most of the new regional party chiefs were younger and better educated than their predecessors. Moreover, unlike Gomulka's appointees, most of them had gained their experience through work in the provinces they headed rather than in the central apparatus.

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26. A spin-off of the reconstruction of the party at the regional level was the infusion of workers and peasants into the regional and local central committees. This not only fit Giersek's doctrine of more party contact with the masses, but in many cases had the added value of incorporating vocal working-class leaders into the establishment. Although these personnel changes did not fully overcome the passive resistance in local organizations, they did result in a local apparatus sufficiently pliable to give Giersek the delegates and endorsement he needed at the party congress. These organizational measures were accompanied by a relatively quiet purge of the 2.3 million rank-and-file membership--100,000 are estimated to have been dropped from the rolls or expelled.

27. With the stage thus set, the party congress was a broad-brush affair that formalized what in effect had already been accomplished. It endorsed the outline of Giersek's reform program and selected for the party's high command more adherents to his style of rule. Almost 60 percent of the new central committee were freshmen, many of them workers. Giersek thus had both a new leadership team and a central party apparatus on which he could rely to support his programs.

28. Neither at the congress nor elsewhere has Giersek revealed what changes he intends to make in the fundamental role of the party. Indeed, there is good reason to believe that he intends to make no dramatic institutional changes, but instead to concentrate on pragmatic and gradual reforms. There can be little doubt that Giersek is no less determined than Gomulka to preserve the "leading role" of the party--both his position at home and his acceptability to Moscow depend on his doing so. He has already announced that one of the major goals of a planned new constitution for the country is to anchor party primacy in constitutional law.

29. Nevertheless, Giersek, unlike Gomulka, has already lowered the party's profile, not only vis-a-vis the people, but also in relation to the government. He believes that in formulating policy

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the party should draw heavily on non-party expertise monitor and mobilize public opinion, and put pressure on the bureaucracy. Without prejudicing the party's ultimate power to intervene, he feels the practical implementation of policy should be left as much as possible to the appropriate branches of the government and to the mass organizations. Streamlining the apparatus and increasing its efficiency appear to be major considerations, but by divorcing the party from the most visible aspects of the day-to-day management of affairs, Gierek hopes to cushion the leadership against a future crisis of confidence such as that of December 1970.

The Government

30. To supplement the new party team, Gierek forged a new team in government. The parliamentary elections in March of this year, which--like the party congress--were held a year ahead of schedule were a necessary prelude to the final phase of Gierek's reconstruction of the governmental apparatus. The results were a broad endorsement of the regime, an outcome that Gierek had expected. The fact that two thirds of the newly elected parliament are newcomers indicates the success of his effort to put his own stamp on the legislature. The personnel shifts effected at the first session of the new parliament focused on cabinet posts in areas of high priority for the Gierek regime--the economic and social portfolios--and were in line with his earlier appointments of competent professionals.

31. Gierek has already outlined some of the specific tasks that will face his new government and the legislature. He appears intent on giving his program a new institutional and legal basis. He is proposing a new constitution to come into effect sometime in 1973, the amendment of many as yet unspecified "obsolete laws," the reform of local government, and passage of a new labor code to put his relationship with the workers on a solid legal basis.

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32. These measures are in line with Gierek's commitment to restore the forms of "socialist democracy" and to establish a streamlined and relatively independent governmental apparatus. At the same time, plans to accord a more significant role to parliament, local government, trade unions, and other representative organizations lend credibility to Gierek's pledge to give the people a wider voice. He has already made some gestures toward Poland's two non-Marxist political parties and toward various other groups by soliciting advice on matters affecting their members. In addition, he has reinvigorated the leadership of the National Unity Front political umbrella organization to make it more representative of its membership.

Outlook

33. Gierek is taking Poland down a new road that, because of necessity as much as his own pragmatic inclinations, he has left largely undefined. Nevertheless, he has gained a measure of support from a skeptical people, whom he has promised not only to lead but also to consult. His actions have shown that he means what he says on the need for dialogue between the rulers and the ruled, for enlisting the talents of the broadest spectrum of the population, for a freer flow of information, and for humanizing the party's approach to internal political and economic matters.

34. There is, of course, no Warsaw Spring in the offing. Still less would any Poles, especially Silesians who know how Gierek operates, compare him to a Dubcek. As a tough and thoroughly pragmatic politician, Gierek knows that certain essentials--Poland's alliance with the USSR, the basic features of the internal system, and national unity under the party's aegis--are not to be tampered with. While he has eschewed force, he has made it clear that he intends to curb all forms of "anti-social" behavior. His actions have already improved the political and social climate to the extent that persuasion rather than coercion is the rule.

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35. Moreover, Gierek seems to have pushed out or neutralized the few potential adversaries in the top echelon of the party, and he is intent on molding a stubborn and rigid bureaucracy in his image. His program promises no miracles, only hard work and dedication. These qualities, he has pledged, will be justly rewarded. As a result, the people appear inclined to give him the time he needs to fulfill his promises.

36. The key to Gierek's long-term prospects is whether he can achieve results in the economic field. The inert bureaucracy and backwardness inherited by Gierek have caused Poland to lag behind other East European countries in introducing technological change and improvements in management and planning. Gierek has to contend with serious structural problems resulting from under-investment in food processing, the construction industry, transport and communication, and agriculture. The resulting limitations on output make fulfillment of his hope of improving the variety and quality of the food supply and reducing the chronic shortage of housing very difficult. These are some of the reasons for Gierek's high-priority drive to acquire Western technology in order to break the self-perpetuating cycle of high capital costs, low labor productivity, and wasteful use of materials.

37. Gierek cannot expect real improvement in the economic situation until some time after 1975. Meanwhile, he has promised or implied economic reforms in the direction of consumerism. But the measurable institutional shifts have been negligible, and there is no evidence that any major change toward even a modified market economy is planned. Gierek seems to intend to streamline the apparatus of power, and to "energize" the workers and managers. He wants to alter popular attitudes while leaving the system largely intact. In the process, he hopes to maintain the delicate balance between sometimes contradictory objectives--for example, national "engagement" in the process of renewal and worker discipline as against a freer internal atmosphere; firm party authority as against a democratized and reformed governmental system; and greater responsibility by management as against worker participation in the decision-making process.

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38. It is clear that even with what he has done so far, Gierek has not eliminated the well-entrenched proponents of the old ways of doing things. And he certainly cannot ignore the wishes of his more conservative allies, especially the USSR. Given the circumstances of his coming to power, Gierek must sometimes be anxious lest Soviet leaders come to see themselves as losers no matter what happens in Poland. If Gierek fails, Moscow may face an even more serious crisis than in December 1970. If he succeeds in creating a new path to socialism, many of his populist innovations will have wide appeal elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

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